

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 6524

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, LE, SY

SUBJECT: A POLITICAL VIEW FROM BAALBEK

1. SUMMARY: GREEK ORTHODOX DEPUTY ALBERT MANSOUR FROM BAALBEK IS CERTAIN OF SYRIAN AGGRESSIVE DESIGNS ON BOTH LEBANON AND PALESTINAINS IN LEBANON, PROBABLY SO AS TO WIN CONCESSIONS FROM ISRAEL. CAIRO ACCORDS ON PALESTINIAN STATUS ARE STILL VIABLE. SYRIANS ARE CAPABLE OF MILITARILY CRUSHING PALESTINIANS, BUT THIS WOULD SERVE TO RADICALIZE PLO, NOT SOLVE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM IN LONG RUN. PALESTINIAN PROBLEM HAS EXACERBATED LEBANESE-LEBANESE TENSION, BUT LATTER CAN BE COMPLETELY RESOLVED BY PURELY POLITICAL REFORMS. THERE IS NO SOCIAL OR ECONOMIC PROBLEM AMONG LEBANESE, AND IMPORTANCE OF LEBANESE LEFT HAS BEEN GREATLY EXAGGERATED. END SUMMARY.

2. EMBOFF PAID CALL JULY 21 ON ALBERT MANSOUR, 37-YEAR-OLD GREEK ORTHODOX DEPUTY FROM RAS BAALBEK SINCE 1972, GRADUATE OF ECOLE DES SCIENCES POLITIQUES IN PARIS, DOCTOR OF LAW AND OCCASIONAL PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE.

3. SYRIAN DESIGNS. MANSOUR IS CONVINCED THAT SYRIANS HAVE HAD DESIGNS ON LEBANON FOR A LONG TIME. HE SAID
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HE HAD PERSONALLY INVESTIGATED TWO OF EARLIEST INCIDENTS

IN 1975 OF MOSLEM LEBANESE ACTIONS AGAINST CHRISTIAN VILLAGES IN THE BEKAA AND AKKAR, AND DISCOVERED SYRIAN/SAIQA AGENTS PROVACATEURS IN BOTH CASES. HE SAID HE HAD LONG CONVERSATION WITH SYRIAN FONMIN KHADDAM IN AUGUST 1975 -- A TRANQUIL PERIOD -- DURING WHICH KHADDAM TOLD HIM UNMISTAKABLY THAT SYRIA WAS GOING TO MAKE SURE THAT PRO-SYRIAN DEPUTIES WERE ELECTED IN LEBANON AND DOMINATE LEBANON GENERALLY. SYRIAN INTENT WAS TO CRUSH PALESTINIANS IN LEBANON, IN RETURN FOR ISRAELI TERRITORIAL CONCESSIONS. SYRIANS, HE BELIEVES, WILL WANT TO PERPETUATE INTRA-LEBANESE DIFFERENCES SO AS TO MAINTAIN EXCUSE FOR CONTINUED INVOLVEMENT. HE SEES SYRIAN HAND BEHIND MOST EVENTS IN LEBANON IN LAST 12 MONTHS. AS A DEPUTY, HE PARTICULARLY RESENTS FACT THAT HE COULD NOW ONLY SEE HIS OWN CONSTITUENTS IN BAALBEK (WHICH HE HAS NOT VISITED FOR OVER A MONTH) WITH SYRIAN APPROVAL.

4. PALESTINIAN STATUS. MANSOUR BELIEVES PALESTINIANS WILL NEVER BE BROUGHT TO HEEL, BY SYRIANS OR ANYONE ELSE. SYRIANS MIGHT IMPOSE "MILITARY SOLUTION" ON PALESTINIANS IN LEBANON, BUT WOULD THEREBY ONLY SUCCEED IN RADICALIZING PLO INTERNALLY. HE DOUBTS THAT PALESTINIANS, EVEN REJECTIONISTS, WANT TO CREATE A STATE-WITHIN-A-STATE IN SOUTH LEBANON. THERE IS NO INTERIM SOLUTION OTHER THAN RETURN TO THE CAIRO ACCORDS, COUPLED WITH EGYPTIAN OR PAN-ARAB GUARANTEES TO PLO, BUT HE AGREED WITH EMBOFF THAT THE ACCORDS WERE SUBJECT TO VARYING INTERPRETATION. HE THOUGHT THAT SOVIETS WOULD NEVER PERMIT COMPLETE SYRIAN DOMINATION OF PLO, BUT HAD NO IDEA HOW SOVIETS MIGHT PREVENT IT.

5. UNDERLYING LEBANESE POLITICAL TENDENCIES. MANSOUR BELIEVES THAT THERE IS NO SOCIAL OR ECONOMIC BASIS TO CURRENT WAR. NASSERISTS, COMMUNISTS, ETC., MAKE MUCH NOISE, BUT HAVE LITTLE POPULAR SUPPORT. JUNBLATT IS REALLY VERY CONSERVATIVE, EVEN REACTIONARY, BUT HAS BEEN COMPELLED BY EVENTS TO POSE AS LEADER OF "LEFT" AND ALLY HIMSELF WITH PALESTINIANS. IF ONLY FRANJIEH
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HAD, SAY, MADE JUNBLATT MINISTER OF INTERIOR, HE WOULD HAVE CONTINUED TO WORK WITHIN CONSTITUTIONAL SYSTEM. LEBAN DTB"LEFT," SUCH AS IT IS, HAS BEEN CREATED BY MARONITE INTRANSIGENCE.

6. POLITICAL REFORM. MANSOUR'S PANACEA FOR LEBANESE-LEBANESE PROBLEM, WHICH HE PERCEIVES AS PURELY

POLITICAL, IS SYSTEM OF PURE PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION. HE BELIEVES THAT THREE BASIC GROUPINGS WOULD EMERGE IN A CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES UNDER SUCH A SYSTEM: A RIGHT, A CENTER, AND A LEFT. LATTER, BY FAR, WOULD BE WEAKEST OF THE THREE, AND LEBANON WOULD BE EFFECTIVELY GOVERNED BY CENTER-RIGHT COALITION INDEFINITELY. AS INTERIM MEASURE -- PERHAPS FOR FIFTH YEARS -- HE WOULD ACCEPT/SUP9945 - 50-50 CHRISTIAN-MOSLEM CONFESSIONAL DIVISION OF CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES, PROVIDED PARTY-BASED PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION STILL PREVAILED WITHIN EACH CONFESSIONAL GROUP. HE BELIEVES PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION IS ONLY POSSIBLE SYSTEM FOR SMALL COUNTRY SUCH AS LEBANON WITH SO MANY DIVERSE GROUPS. HE SPOKE APPROVINGLY OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION IN ISRAEL, WHICH, HE THOUGHT, HAD ADMIRABLY SUCCEEDED IN UNITING GREAT VARIETY OF JEWISH GROUPS FROM MANY DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE WORLD. WOULD SYRIANS PERMIT THIS KIND OF CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM? MANSOUR DOUBTED IT, BUT THOUGHT THAT IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE, IF SYRIANS WITHDREW THEIR FORCES TO PERIPHERAL AREAS OF LEBANON.

7. COMMENT: MANSOUR IS POLITICALLY CLOSE TO RAYMOND EDDE. HIS DISTRUST OF SYRIANS AND LACK OF CONCERN ABOUT LEFTIST TENDENCIES PROBABLY DERIVE FROM HIS BAALBEK POLITICAL BASE. HIS TRAINING AS A LAWYER AND POLITICAL SCIENTIST PERHAPS ACCOUNTS FOR HIS TENDENCY TO SEE ISSUES ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY IN POLITICAL-STRUCTURAL TERMS.
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